

Jim Justice

James Conley Justice II (born April 27, 1951) is an American coal mining and agriculture businessman, who has been serving as the 36th governor of West Virginia since 2017. With a net worth of around \$1.9 billion, he is the wealthiest person in West Virginia.^[2] He inherited a coal mining business from his father and built a business empire with over 94 companies, including the Greenbrier, a luxury resort.^[3]

In 2015, Justice announced his candidacy for governor in the 2016 West Virginia gubernatorial election. Although Justice was a registered Republican before running for governor, he ran as a Democrat and defeated the Republican nominee, Bill Cole. Less than seven months after taking office, Justice switched back to the Republican Party after announcing his plans at a rally with U.S. president Donald Trump in the state.

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Early life

Jim Justice



36th Governor of West Virginia

Incumbent

Assumed office

January 16, 2017

Preceded by Earl Ray Tomblin

Personal details

Born James Conley Justice II

April 27, 1951

Charleston, West Virginia, U.S.

Political party Republican (before 2015, 2017–present) Democratic (2015–2017)

Height 6'7"

Spouse(s) Cathy Comer (m. 1975)

Children 2

Residence Governor's Mansion (official)*

Education University of Tennessee

James Conley Justice II was born in Charleston, the son of James Conley Justice and Edna Ruth (née Perry) Justice. Justice grew up in Raleigh County, West Virginia. He enrolled at the University of Tennessee on an athletic scholarship for golf, but transferred to Marshall University. At Marshall, he was a two-year captain on the Thundering Herd golf team.^[4] He earned his bachelor's degree and Master of Business Administration from Marshall.^[5]

Marshall University
(BA, MBA)

Net worth ▲US\$1.6 billion
(2017)^[1]

Website Government website (h
ttp://governor.wv.gov)

Note: Justice resides in Lewisburg,
West Virginia and does not live in the
official residence.

Business career

After college, Justice went into the family agriculture business.^[5] Justice founded Bluestone Farms in 1977, which now operates 50,000 acres (20,000 ha) of farmland, and is the leading producer of grain on the East Coast of the United States. During that time, he also developed Stoney Brook Plantation, a 15,000-acre hunting and fishing preserve in Monroe County. Justice is a seven-time national corn growing champion.^[6] After the death of his father in 1993, Justice inherited ownership of Bluestone Industries and Bluestone Coal Corporation. In 2009, he sold some of his coal business to the Russian company Mechel for \$568 million. In 2015, after a huge drop in the price of coal which led Mechel to close some of the mines, he bought the business back for just \$5 million.^{[7][8]} Since buying back the mine from Mechel, Justice re-opened several of the mines and hired over 200 coal miners.^[9]

Justice's mining companies have been under the spotlight for alleged cases of safety violation and unpaid taxes; in 2016, NPR called him the "top mine safety delinquent" in the United States.^[10] Justice allegedly owed millions of dollars to the government in back taxes, and unpaid coal mining fees and fines: "His mining companies owe \$15 million in six states, including property and minerals taxes, state coal severance and withholding taxes, and federal income, excise and unemployment taxes, as well as mine safety penalties, according to county, state and federal records."^[11] Two debt-related lawsuits were settled in 2019,^[12] and in 2020 mining companies owned by Justice or his family agreed to pay \$5 million in delinquent safety fines.^[13]

According to a ProPublica investigation, Justice paid more than \$128 million in judgments and settlements over unpaid bills by his businesses.^{[14][15]}

Forbes estimates Justice's net worth at \$1.6 billion.^[16] Justice serves as the owner or chief executive officer of over 50 companies, including the Greenbrier in White Sulphur Springs, West Virginia, which he bought for \$20.5 million in 2009, preventing its bankruptcy.^[7] Justice is in the process of building a new mountaintop golf course with golfers Jack Nicklaus, Gary Player, and Lee Trevino. Arnold Palmer was involved before his 2016 death.^[17]

As of 2014, he owned 70 active mines in 5 states. His charitable activities have included \$25 million for the James C. Justice National Scout Camp at The Summit Bechtel Family National Scout Reserve, \$5 million for Marshall University, and \$10 million to the Cleveland Clinic.^[18] Justice gives away more than \$1 million in Christmas gifts annually through the Dream Tree for Kids campaign.^[19]

Before taking office as governor, Justice resigned from all the executive positions he held at his business. He placed his daughter Jill in charge of the Greenbrier and his son Jay in charge of his mining and agriculture businesses. He has said he will place all his assets in a blind trust, but that the process will take time because of their complexity.^{[20][21]} During the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, Justice and his family's businesses received at least between \$11 million and \$24 million in aid through the Paycheck

Protection Program.^[15] His luxury resort, the Greenbrier Hotel Corporation, received a loan of between \$5 million and \$10 million, but the company did not promise to retain any jobs in exchange for the aid.^[15]

As Governor of West Virginia, he is in charge of the state agencies that regulate many of his businesses.^[15]

Political career

In 2015, Justice declared his candidacy for Governor of West Virginia in the 2016 election as a member of the Democratic Party.^[7] He had been a registered member of the Republican Party until changing his registration in February 2015.^[22] This was his first time running for political office.^[23] In May 2016, Justice won the Democratic nomination for governor and ran against Republican nominee Bill Cole in the general election.^[24] On November 8, Justice won the election.^{[25][26]}

Justice was endorsed by the United Mine Workers.^[27]

Governor of West Virginia

Justice took office as governor on January 16, 2017. He is known for using colorful metaphors and digs at political opponents.^{[28][29]}

To improve West Virginia's budget situation, he has proposed raising the state's revenue by \$450 million, primarily by increasing the consumer sales tax, reinstituting the business and occupation (B & O) tax, and establishing a "rich man's" tax.^[30] He also opposed plans to cut health and education spending.^[31] On April 13, 2017, while vetoing a budget bill passed by the Republican-controlled West Virginia Legislature, Justice said the bill was "nothing more than a bunch of political you-know-what" and showed a prop featuring bull feces on a print copy of the bill.^[32]

On August 3, 2017, Justice announced that he had rejoined the Republican Party. He made the announcement at a Donald Trump rally in Huntington and also confirmed his support for the sitting president. Justice said that he was returning to the GOP because he could not support President Trump as a member of the Democratic Party. The announcement came as a surprise to his own staff.^[33] This also made Justice the first Republican governor of West Virginia since Cecil Underwood in 2001.

Even after switching to the Republican Party, Justice initially supported incumbent Democrat Joe Manchin for his reelection campaign in the 2018 Senate election in West Virginia.^[34] However, later in the general election, Justice endorsed Republican Senate candidate, Patrick Morrisey.^[35]

Tenure

Political positions



Jim and Cathy Justice meeting Vice President Mike Pence in March 2017



Justice at his inauguration

Justice began his gubernatorial campaign and political career as a conservative Democrat.^{[36][37]} *Time* identified him as a moderate Democrat.^[38] However, as noted above, he switched to the Republican Party a few months after taking office and declared his support for President Donald Trump.^[39]

Economic policy

Justice campaigned and has governed with support for the coal industry.^[40] He does not support raising taxes, but has supported increasing teachers' salaries arguing that increased state revenue will pay for the increased budget spending.^[41] In 2017, Justice said that he opposed budget cuts and supported raising sales taxes.^[42] The libertarian Cato Institute gave Justice an "F" grade based on their positions, but Justice voiced his disagreement with the rating.^[43]

Abortion

Justice had said that he does not support abortion, but that the Supreme Court had decided the issue.^[44] Later, Justice attended a rally supporting Amendment 1, a state constitutional amendment intended to ban abortion if *Roe v. Wade* is overturned.^{[45][46]} He is considered pro-life and signed two anti-abortion bills into law.^[47]

Gun control

Justice supports gun ownership and limited gun laws. In 2018, Justice signed into a law a bill allowing gun owners to keep their guns locked in vehicles on their employers' property, a bill that was supported by the NRA.^[48] He also signed a bill legalizing hunting on Sundays on private land.^[49]

Healthcare

Justice supports West Virginia's Medicaid expansion, which was implemented by the previous governor under provisions of the Affordable Care Act.^[50]

LGBTQ rights

Justice stated that he respects the Supreme Court's decision on *Obergefell v. Hodges*, which legalized same-sex marriage nationwide, and that it is settled law.^[51] In 2017, Justice opposed a bill that would have allowed businesses to refuse service to LGBTQ customers.^[52]

Environmental policy

According to the *Charleston Gazette-Mail*, Justice has equivocated on the scientific consensus on global warming. In a 2016 interview with the paper, he said: "There's documentation that would give one concern, and I don't think you should ignore that", he said. "At the same time, I think there's an awful lot of research that still should be done. [...] I surely wouldn't sit here and say I am a believer in global warming, but I wouldn't sit here and say that I am not concerned."^[6]

Personal life

Justice met his wife, Cathy (*née* Comer) in high school.^[53] They have two children, Jay and Jill.^[5] He stands at 6 feet 7 inches (2.01 m).^[54] Justice is a lifelong fan of the New Orleans Saints of the National Football League (NFL), and spent \$30 million to develop a training facility for the team to use in 2014 at the Greenbrier.^[7]^[16] Until 2019, he hosted the Greenbrier Classic, a PGA Tour event, at the Greenbrier annually.^[7]

Justice lives in Lewisburg, West Virginia. He is being sued about his residency by state house assistant minority whip Isaac Sponaule, on the basis that Justice is not actually living in the West Virginia Governor's Mansion in Charleston. The state constitution requires the governor to "reside at the seat of government", Charleston. The lawsuit is now before the West Virginia State Supreme Court.^[55]

Youth sports

Since 1992, Justice has been president of Beckley Little League. His participation has helped the program expand to over 1,000 children playing on 80 teams.

Having lived in Lewisburg since 2001, he has been the girls basketball coach at Greenbrier East High School since 2003, having won the state championship in 2012. In 2011, he also became the head coach for the boys basketball teams, a position from which he stepped down in September 2017.^[56] He was the only coach at the AAA level (the state's largest classification) who coached both the girls and boys basketball teams. Justice stated that though he will place his business interests in a blind trust upon becoming governor, he will still coach basketball while serving.^[57] In discussing the coaching position, Justice said, "There are three things I know that I can do, and that's shoot a shotgun, make a deal and coach basketball. I'm excited about it."

Electoral history

2016 West Virginia gubernatorial election, Democratic primary ^[58]				
Party		Candidate	Votes	%
	Democratic	Jim Justice	132,704	51.37%
	Democratic	Booth Goodwin	65,416	25.32%
	Democratic	Jeff Kessler	60,230	23.31%
Total votes			258,350	100.00%

2016 West Virginia gubernatorial election ^[59]				
Party		Candidate	Votes	%
	Democratic	Jim Justice	350,408	49.09%
	Republican	Bill Cole	301,987	42.30%
	Mountain	Charlotte Pritt	42,068	5.89%
	Libertarian	David Moran	15,354	2.15%
	Constitution	Phil Hudok	4,041	0.57%
Total votes			713,858	100.00%
	Democratic hold			

2020 West Virginia gubernatorial election, Republican primary				
Party		Candidate	Votes	%
	Republican	Jim Justice (incumbent)	127,445	63.0%
	Republican	Woody Thrasher	37,019	18.3%
	Republican	Michael Folk	24,896	12.3%
	Republican	Doug Six	4,231	2.1%
	Republican	Brooke Lunsford	3,675	1.8%
	Republican	Shelly Jean Fitzhugh	2,560	1.3%
	Republican	Chuck Sheedy	2,415	1.2%
Total votes			202,241	100.0%

See also

- List of American politicians who switched parties in office
- List of richest American politicians
- Party switching in the United States

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External links

- Governor of West Virginia official government website (<https://governor.wv.gov/>)
- Jim Justice (https://curlie.org/Regional/North_America/United_States/West_Virginia/Government/Executive/Governor_Jim_Justice) at Curlie
- "Jim Justice" article in The West Virginia Encyclopedia (<http://www.wvencyclopedia.org/articles/2350>)
- Poll Numbers on Jim Justice (<http://politicselections.com/poll-jim-justice-losing-favor-among-republicans/>)
- Appearances (<https://www.c-span.org/person/?jimjustice>) on C-SPAN

Party political offices		
Preceded by Earl Ray Tomblin	Democratic nominee for Governor of West Virginia <u>2016</u>	Succeeded by Ben Salango
Preceded by Bill Cole	Republican nominee for Governor of West Virginia <u>2020</u>	Most recent
Political offices		
Preceded by Earl Ray Tomblin	Governor of West Virginia 2017–present	Incumbent
U.S. order of precedence (ceremonial)		
Preceded by Mike Pence <i>as Vice President</i>	Order of Precedence of the United States Within West Virginia	Succeeded by Mayor of city in which event is held
		Succeeded by Otherwise Nancy Pelosi <i>as Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives</i>
Preceded by Laura Kelly <i>as Governor of Kansas</i>	Order of Precedence of the United States Outside West Virginia	Succeeded by Steve Sisolak <i>as Governor of Nevada</i>

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